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President Bush

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Commitment to Democracy and Economic Progress in Latin America

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Following is an address by President Bush before the Council of the Americas, Washington, D.C., May 2, 1989.

Looking around the world today, in developing countries and even in the communist bloc, we see the triumph of two great ideas: the idea of free government and the idea of free enterprise. And certainly, Latin America and the Caribbean are proving fertile ground for these ideas. Democracy, a decade ago the exception, I think we would all agree, is today the rule. And the symbol of this new breeze is the ballot box. And by year's end, 14 national elections will have been held across the Americas.

And let's remember what it means to vote in some countries when democracy itself is at stake. We're not talking about people who may stay home from the polls because it's raining or rush-hour traffic is heavy. We're talking, in some cases, about people literally risking their lives to exercise their democratic right.

And listen to the words of a Salvadoran man on the eve of last month's presidential elections in that country—elections that guerrilla forces vowed to disrupt: "Of course, I'm going to vote, although I have to admit it's very scary. Here, going to the grocery store can be dangerous—but you have to do it. And you have to vote, too. We just can't roll over and play dead each time we're threatened." That's the voice of democracy speaking, and it's the voice of courage and hope.

Economically, although there is mounting concern about international debt, there are encouraging signs as well. Mexico has joined GATT [General Agreement on Tarifts and Trade] and is moving toward a more open and internationally oriented economy. In Costa Rica and Brazil and Venezuela, new ventures are creating export opportunities that promise a broader economic base for those countries. You in the business community are among the pioneers and partners in these changes. And you're contributing to Latin America's increased productivity—you're helping the region to fulfill its potential for progress.

The historic shift in political and economic thinking now underway in Latin America is good news for us all. Our task is clear: to make the most of the new opportunities open to us, we must improve our working partnerships in this hemisphere—between countries north and south; between government, business, and labor; and, in the United States, between the different branches of the federal government. We share common interests—we must work toward a common aim.

My Administration will work to build a new partnership for the Americas—a partnership built on mutual respect and mutual responsibilities. And we seek a partnership rooted in a common commitment to democratic rule.

The battle for democracy is far from over. The institutions of free government are still fragile and in need of support. Our battlefield is the broad middle ground of democracy and popular government—our fight against the enemies of freedom on the extreme right and on the extreme left.

Democracy for Nicaragua

As a result of the recent Bipartisan Accord on Central America, the United States is speaking with one voice on a matter of crucial importance to peace in Central America: bringing democracy to Nicaragua and peace to the region. And I want to salute our Secretary of State [James A. Baker, III] for hammering out this bipartisan accord when many, 2 or 3 months ago, said that it could not be done.

Let me take this opportunity to make several observations on steps that are vital to peace, security, and democracy in Central America.

First, Nicaragua's effort to export violent revolution must stop. We cannot tolerate Sandinista support—which continues today—for the insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala and terrorism in Honduras as well. Peace in the region cannot coexist with attempts to undermine democracy.

And **second,** we call upon the Soviet Union to end Soviet-bloc support for the Nicaraguan assault on regional democracy. The United States ended military aid to the Nicaraguan Resistance 2 years ago. And yet, since that time, the Soviets continue to funnel about $0.5 billion worth of military assist-

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ance a year to the Sandinista regime—about the same rate as before we stopped our military aid to the *contras*. Furthermore, Cuba and Nicaragua, supplied by $7 billion in Soviet-bloc aid, have stepped up the arms flow to the Salvadoran guerrillas. Soviet-bloc weapons, such as AK–47s, are now being sent through Cuba and Nicaragua to the guerrillas. And that aid must stop.

The Soviet Union must understand that we hold it accountable for the consequences of this intervention—and for progress toward peace in the region and democracy in Nicaragua. As the bipartisan accord makes clear, continued Soviet support of violence and subversion in Central America is in direct violation of the Esquipulas agreement concluded by the nations of Central America a year and a half ago.

Finally, within Nicaragua, we want to see a promise kept—the promise of democracy, withheld by the Sandinista regime for nearly a decade. To this end, the United States will continue to supply humanitarian aid to the Nicaraguan Resistance through the elections scheduled in Nicaragua for February of 1990. The conduct and the outcome of those elections will demonstrate to Nicaragua's neighbors and the international community whether it means to deliver on democracy.

But the Sandinistas' recent attacks are ominous. April 25th was the benchmark date for Nicaragua to have in place electoral laws consistent with free and fair elections. Instead, restrictive new election and press laws have been pushed through the Sandinista-controlled legislature. These laws have been unilaterally imposed, and the proposals of Nicaragua's opposition parties have been ignored. The result is a stacked deck against the opposition and stacked rules of the game.

The election law mandates unilaterally that half of all foreign political contributions go to the Supreme Electoral Council, which remains under Sandinista control, and ignores proposals put forward by the opposition to provide for unlimited freedom of access for international election observers. In effect, that is a stacked deck against freedom. The new law governing press conduct gives excessive controls to the Interior Ministry to police violations against what they call "national integrity" and continues the prohibition of private-sector ownership of television stations.

If there's to be peace in Nicaragua, the Sandinista regime must work with the opposition—including the Resistance—to put in place election and press laws that are truly free and fair. And that means to have free and fair elections with outside observers given unfettered access to all election places and to all proceedings. It means a secret ballot on election day, the freedom to campaign, to organize, to hold rallies—and to poll public opinion, to operate independent radio and TV stations as well. It means the absence of intimidation either from a politicized Sandinista military or police or from those neighborhood block committees that control people's ration cards. It means an end to the arrests and bullying of opposition leaders. It means freeing all political prisoners jailed under the Sandinista rule, not just a handful of former Somoza soldiers.

And if the Sandinistas fail this test, it will be a tragic setback—and a dangerous one. The consolidation of tyranny will not be peace; it will be a crisis waiting to happen.

Current Elections for Democracy

I want to mention several other Latin American nations where elections can signal positive change.

In **El Salvador,** last month's free and fair elections proved another ringing affirmation of that nation's commitment to democracy. We expect ARENA [National Republican Alliance] to exercise its political power responsibly. And I have conveyed personally to President-elect Cristiani our commitment to human rights in El Salvador. I honestly feel that he shares my concern, and he deserves our support.

In **Paraguay,** the only country whose dictator had held power longer than Fidel Castro, elections have just taken place—the first hopeful sign that Paraguay is on its way to joining the democratic mainstream. And we do congratulate President-elect Rodriguez on his electoral victory and look forward to working with him. This democratic opening must continue.

In **Panama,** however—Jim [Secretary of State Baker] spoke to you all about this yesterday—the forecast for freedom is less clear. A free and fair vote in the elections scheduled for this Sunday would enable Panama to take a significant step toward ending the international isolation and internal economic crisis brought on by the Noriega regime. And, in spite of intimidation from authorities, Panama's opposition parties have—with great courage—taken their campaign to the Panamanian people. The Noriega regime's candidates are trailing in poll after poll by a margins of two to one.

Unfortunately, as Secretary Baker told you yesterday, it is evident that the regime is ready to resort to massive election fraud in order to remain in power. The Noriega regime continues to threaten and intimidate Panamanians who believe in democracy. It's also attempting to limit the presence and freedom of action of international observers and to prevent journalists from reporting on the election process in Panama. Let me be clear: the United States will not recognize the results of a fraudulent election engineered simply to keep Noriega in power.

All nations that value democracy—that understand free and fair elections are the very heart of their democratic system—should speak out against election fraud in Panama. And that means the democracies of Europe—they ought to be speaking out about this—as well as nations in this hemisphere struggling to preserve the democratic systems they've fought so hard to put in place.

It is time for the plain truth: the day of the dictator is over. The people's right to democracy must not be denied.

Principles of Economic Freedom

A commitment to democracy is only one element in the new partnership that I envision for the nations of the Americas. This new partnership must also aim at ensuring that the market economies survive and prosper and prevail. The principles of economic freedom have not been applied as fully as the principle of democracy. While the poverty of statism and protectionism is more evident than ever, statist economies remain in place, stifling growth in many Latin nations.

And that is why the United States has made a new initiative to reduce the weight of the debt, as Latin governments and leaders take the difficult steps to restructure their economies. Economic growth requires policies that create a climate for investment—one that will attract new capital, one that will reverse the flight of capital out of the region.

We welcome the broad, international support that has been expressed for our ideas to strengthen the debt strategy. We urge the parties involved—the international financial institutions, debtor countries, commercial banks—to make a sustained effort to move this process forward. We recognize the competing claims debtor governments must try to satisfy as they work to advance

economic reform, service their debt, and respond to the needs of their citizens. However, we also understand that progress can be an incremental process—case-by-case, step-by-step—provided there is a clear commitment to economic reform—I want to say some case-by-case successes in this hemisphere. To that end, we've started discussions, as you know, with Mexico and Venezuela and other countries as well.

Narcotics Traffickers

Finally, our common partnership must confront a common enemy: international drug traffickers. Drugs threaten citizens and civil society throughout our hemisphere. Joining forces in the war on drugs is crucial. There is nothing to be gained by trying to lay blame and make recriminations. Drug abuse is a problem of both supply and demand—and attacking both is the only way we can face and defeat the drug menace.

I believe that there is much more understanding on this point in this hemisphere south of our border than there used to be. It is my view that countries to the south felt for many years that this was simply the problem of a U.S. market for this insidious product. Now they see that their own societies are being undermined by drug use. Now they see that their own sense of order is being undermined by those trafficking in narcotics. So I would call for much more cooperation between the countries of this hemisphere to combat the menace of narcotics.

Conclusion

There's a place in this new partnership for all of you in the Council of Americas. Thomas Paine said that, "the prosperity of any commercial nation is regulated by the prosperity of the rest." Your efforts do contribute. They contribute directly to the greater prosperity of all of the nations of the Americas.

The challenge I've spoken of today won't be easy. But all of us—north and south, in government and in the private sector—can work together to meet the challenges and master them. We know we've got a lot of work to do. And you know you've got a lot of work to do—work that won't wait—to ensure that all the Americas enjoy the peace, the freedom, and the prosperity that we cherish.

Thank you for what you're doing. Redouble your efforts. And I promise you, we'll do our level best in the executive branch of this government.■

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